

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
BATTLE MOUNTAIN DISTRICT/TONOPAH FIELD OFFICE

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Amendment to the Mineral Ridge Mine Plan of Operations: **DOI-BLM-NV-B020-2015-0030-EA** dated March 2015. After consideration of the environmental effects as described in the EA, (and incorporated herein), I have determined that the Proposed Action with the Project design features identified in the EA will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as described in 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 40 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required per section 102(2) (c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

DOI-BLM-NV-B020-2015-0030-EA has been reviewed through the interdisciplinary team process, as well as being sent to the Nevada State Clearinghouse and the public for a 15-day comment period.

After consideration of the environmental effects on the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) preferred alternative (the Proposed Action) described in the EA and the supporting baseline documentation, it has been determined that the Proposed Action identified in the EA is not a major Federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment.

It has been determined that the Proposed Action is in conformance with the approved Tonopah Resource Management Plan and its amendments, and is consistent with the plans and policies of neighboring local, county, state, tribal, and federal agencies and governments.

Context

The BLM has prepared an EA, DOI-BLM-NV-B020-2015-0030-EA that analyzes the affected environment, environmental impacts, and identifies environmental protection measures (EPMs) associated with the Mineral Ridge Gold, LLC (MRG) *Mineral Ridge Mine Mary LC and Satellite Deposits* Plan of Operations Amendment (NVN-73109) (Plan Amendment) which was submitted on June 26, 2014, with subsequent revisions in August 2014 and March 2015. The Plan Amendment was submitted in accordance with the BLM Surface Management Regulations 43 code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 3809, as amended. The Plan of Operations has been assigned BLM case file number N-73109. The Project Area includes approximately 2,700 acres including approximately 2,044 acres of public lands administered by the BLM and 656 acres of private land.

The Project is located within portions of:

Township (T.) 1 South (S.) Range (R.) 39 East (E.) (T. 1S., R. 39E.,) Section 31
T. 1S., R. 38E., Section 36

T. 2S., R. 38E., Sections 1, 2, 11, and 12, and
T. 2S., R. 39E., Sections 5-7, in Esmeralda County, Nevada.

This EA assessed the environmental impacts should the BLM approve MRG's Plan Amendment to include the following:

- Expansion of the Plan of Operations Boundary (Plan Boundary)
- Addition of haul roads on the western side of the Plan Boundary
- Addition of the Bluelite and Solberry pits;
- Increase the size of and production from the Mary LC, Wedge B, and Brodie Pits
- Additions of two new waste rock disposal areas, Solberry and Bluelite
- Partial backfilling of the Brodie Pit with about 900,000 tons of material
- Backfilling of the Wedge B Pit with about 200,000 tons of material
- Increase the capacity of waste rock disposal areas WD-2, WD-4, WD-6, WD-9, WD-10, and WD-11 with area changes also occurring for WD-1, WD-5, and WD-7
- Salvaging growth media and expansion of the growth media stockpile
- Changes to the General Disturbance category which includes disturbance areas such as inter-pit spaces, yard edges, and other uncategorized spaces between facilities
- Re-alignment of water and power lines
- Addition of a physical barrier to public access near the crusher to comply with the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP) Bureau of Air Pollution Control (BAPC) requirements
- Reallocation and increase of exploration disturbance areas, development of the Phase I Exploration Work Plan and focus of future exploration tracking on surface disturbance
- Changes to mobile equipment
- Changes to employment

For a complete description of the proposed Project, please refer to the EA, Section 2.2, Description of the Proposed Action and Alternatives.

Pursuant to the NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations on implementing NEPA, the EA identifies, describes, and evaluates resource protection measures that would mitigate the possible impacts of the proposed Project. The short and long-term impacts as disclosed in the EA are not considered to be significant to the human environment. The short-term impacts from implementation of the Proposed Action are local; they are not regional or national in nature. The long-term impacts resulting from the Proposed Action would be mitigated by concurrent reclamation during the life of the Project and meeting all reclamation requirements prior to closure of the Project.

Intensity

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The Proposed Action would have adverse impacts to resources which are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 of the EA. However, these impacts would be minor due to the EPMs (e.g. reseeding disturbed areas to prevent erosion and ensuring vehicles are free of soil and debris capable of transporting weeds, etc.) as outlined in Section 2.2.5 of the EA.

Travel on dirt roads and drilling within the Project Area have the potential to create fugitive dust and vehicle emissions. Fugitive dust would be controlled by minimizing surface disturbance and utilization of other EPMs described in Section 2.2.5 of the EA. The potential impacts would be temporary and would cease upon completion of the Project and successful revegetation of the surface disturbance.

The EA addresses visual resources in Chapters 3 and 4 of the EA. The impacts to visual resources by the Proposed Action would be short term. Successful reclamation of the site would minimize the linear contrasts with the natural landscapes caused by drill roads. The Project Area is located in areas managed as VRM Class III and Class IV and the Project meets all of the requirements associated with those classifications.

Impacts that would be avoided or minimized by operating and reclamation measures committed to by MRG are presented in Chapter 2 and by the BLM operating and reclamation measures. Reclamation and revegetation of the Project disturbance would gradually reestablish soils, vegetative cover and wildlife habitat. None of the environmental impacts disclosed above and discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 4 of the EA are considered significant.

Reclamation would be completed to the standards described in 43 CFR 3809.420 and Nevada Administrative Code 519A. Reclamation would meet its objectives as outlined in the United States Department of the Interior Solid Minerals Reclamation Handbook #H-3042-1, Surface Management of Mining Operations Handbook H-3809-1, and revegetation success standards per BLM/ NDEP "Revised Guidelines for Successful Mining and Exploration Revegetation."

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.

The effects of the Proposed Action on both public health and safety would not have significant adverse impacts because MRG would be required to follow all Mine, Health, and Safety Administration regulations along with maintaining all equipment and facilities in a safe and orderly manner.

Through adherence to EPMs and Best Management Practices, the Proposed Action would not result in potentially substantial or adverse impacts to public health and safety. Public safety would be maintained throughout the life of the Project. MRG would commit to the following EPMs to insure public health and safety:

- All equipment and other facilities would be maintained in a safe and orderly manner.
- Personnel working at the site would keep the occasional public out of operational areas.
- All sumps and other small excavations that pose a hazard or nuisance to the public, wildlife, or livestock would be adequately fenced to preclude access to them.
- The Project would hire a certified commercial applicator for the application of pesticides on the Project site. Existing roads within the Project Area that are disturbed during the Proposed Action would be reclaimed, by MRG, to their pre-disturbance condition in order to provide continued public access through the area.
- Unpaved roads are well maintained and accommodate two-lane traffic to and from the Project Area.
- Trash and regulated wastes would be contained and hauled to an approved landfill.

- Portable chemical toilets would be used for human waste.
- Drill sites and storage yards would be located off of existing roads.
- Only nontoxic fluids would be used in the drilling process.
- Emissions of fugitive dust from disturbed surfaces would be minimized by utilizing appropriate control measures.
- Speed limits would be enforced.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity of historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The Project Area is located in Esmeralda County, approximately 5 miles west of the town of Silver Peak, Nevada. There are no park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, and wild and scenic rivers in the vicinity.

There are known cultural resources located within the Project Area. All cultural sites will be mitigated or addressed as described in the applicant committed EPMs described in Section 2.2.5.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The Proposed Action is not expected to have effects on the quality of the human environment that are highly controversial. The parameters of the mining and exploration activities, along with associated reclamation are well established. The Project Area is isolated from human habitations. Locked gates have been installed near the active mine entrances on the Coyote Road and the Eagle Canyon Road. Active exploration sumps would be flagged for visibility until they are backfilled. Existing roads would not be blocked by drilling equipment. Following completion of mining, soil/rock berms would be placed around each pit.

The reclamation should return the land to its pre-mining/exploration uses of livestock grazing, mineral exploration, dispersed recreation, and wildlife habitat.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environments are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

There are no known effects of the Proposed Action identified in the EA that are considered highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. Development activities similar to what has been included in the Proposed Action have been conducted numerous times over many years on BLM-administered land and the effects are well understood. This is demonstrated through the effects analysis in Chapters 3 and 4 of the EA.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The Proposed Action will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision about a future consideration. Completion of the EA does not establish a precedent for other assessments or authorization of other development Projects including additional actions at the Project Area. Any future Projects within the area or in surrounding areas will be analyzed on their own merits, independent of the actions currently selected.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

Direct and indirect impacts of the Proposed Action were analyzed in Chapter 3 (Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences) of the EA. None of the environmental impacts disclosed under item 1 above and discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of the EA are considered significant. Past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions have been considered in the cumulative impacts analysis within Chapter 4 of the EA. The cumulative impacts analysis examined all of the affected resources and all other appropriate actions within the Cumulative Effects Study Areas and determined that the Proposed Action would not incrementally contribute to any significant impacts. In addition, for any actions that might be proposed in the future, further site-specific environmental analysis, including assessment of cumulative impacts, would be required.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.

Multiple cultural resource investigations have been conducted within the Project Area and along access roads. A total of 19 prior cultural resources investigations have been conducted, which included the Project Area, the Coyote Road to the west, and the Eagle Canyon Road to the east. These include ten Class III inventories, seven treatment plans for eligible sites, and two eligible site mitigation reports. The entire Project Area has been covered by Class III cultural resource surveys.

Adverse effects to cultural resources are anticipated under the Proposed Action, as some facilities and activities cannot be designed to avoid NRHP-eligible cultural sites in the NRHP-eligible Mineral Ridge Historic Mining District. Development of a treatment plan, data recovery, archaeological documentation, and report preparation in accordance with stipulations in the Proposed Action, and as described in Section **Error! Reference source not found.**, would be undertaken to mitigate adverse effects.

By incorporating the protection measures detailed in Section 2.2.5 of the EA, significant cumulative impacts to cultural resources have not occurred and are not anticipated.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Nevada Natural Heritage Program (NNHP), and Nevada Department of Wildlife were contacted to obtain a list of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species that have the potential to occur within the Project Area. In addition, the BLM Sensitive Species List and Special Status Species lists for the Battle Mountain District were evaluated.

The NNHP database was queried to determine the presence or absence of special status wildlife species in the area of the Proposed Action. Information from the NNHP indicates that no federally threatened or endangered plant or animal species have the potential to occur within the Project Area.

Impacts to special status species or their habitat from the Proposed Action are analyzed in Section 3.16 of the EA. Impacts to special status species which would occur under the Proposed Action would be minimized by the implementation of EPMs including reclamation and mitigation. Mitigation would install two guzzlers which are anticipated to benefit bighorn sheep.

The action complies with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), in that potential effects of this decision on listed species have been analyzed and documented. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA of 1973, as amended.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environments.

The Proposed Action will not violate or threaten to violate any federal, state, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.



Timothy J. Coward
Field Manager


Date